

Racial gap persists in death rate

March 14, 2005

Middle-age black men are dying at nearly twice the rate of white men of a similar age, reflecting lower incomes and poorer access to health care, a study says. But mortality among black infants is dropping.

Although overall longevity for blacks and whites has improved during the last 40 years, the gap between the races has narrowed little, former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher said in a paper published Wednesday in the journal Health Affairs. Elimination of this racial gap would prevent an estimated 83,570 early deaths annually, he said.

About 10,472 of those deaths occurred among black men who were 45 to 54 in 2000, according to research based on a death rate of 1,060 per 100,000 black men in that age group compared with a rate of 503 for white men.

In 1960, the rates were 1,625 for black men and 932 for white men in that age group.

There has been progress for infants, Satcher noted.

Deaths per 100,000 black males younger than 12 months fell from 5,307 in 1960 to 1,653 in 2000, he found. Comparable figures for whites were 2,694 in 1960 and 656 in 2000. For baby girls, the death rate fell from 4,162 in 1960 to 1,363 in 2000 for blacks and from 2,088 to 530 for whites.